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ABSTRACT

This project was designed and implemented at San Diego State University to provide experiential education for speech communication students by serving community organizations that have an interest in developing, maintaining or improving a speakers' bureau. Stage one of the project utilized eight students to conduct research of two types: library research and correspondence to identify professional practices related to bureaus. Stage two was the sponsorship of a community workshop and a pilot program that placed four students in an internship capacity in organizations, with the goals of developing or improving bureaus. Stage three sought to develop an on-going community network for those interested in bureaus. The long-term goal of the project was to have the speech communication department serve as a resource center for the community. Ideally, interested organizations would be able to contact the department and design an acceptable learning program for interns to begin or improve a bureau. This community service in turn would provide students with the challenge of training speakers, publicizing the organization, and worthwhile communication experience. (Seventeen references are attached.) (KEH)

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FOCUSING ON A SPEAKERS' BUREAU AS A COMMUNITY SERVICE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROJECT

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"Focusing On a Speakers' Bureau as a Community Service Experiential Learning Project"

The term "speakers' bureau," as used herein, refers to an entity that functions to represent an organization, in particular, a profit or non-profit community organization. As reviewed below, the term is also used in a number of other ways; for example, in another context "speakers' bureau" might refer to a co-curricular program in a speech communication department or another academic program. This paper focuses on a project designed to provide experiential education for students by serving community organizations that have an interest in developing, maintaining or improving a speakers' bureau.

The Project's Origins

The National Association for Corporate Speakers Activities (NACSA) is an organization designed to serve professionals in a variety of functions, including speakers' bureaus. While attending a NACSA conference, one of the authors perceived that there apparently had been relatively little systematic scholarly effort to develop knowledge about speakers' bureaus, and she resolved to make an effort to assist in developing local bureaus. When some university funding was made available for purposes of community service, the authors seized the opportunity to conduct research and a pilot program for speakers' bureaus. The application was funded with a $8000 grant during 1988-89 and was renewed for $4000 for Fall, 1989.

Many organizations (non-profit ones, in particular) develop speakers' bureaus as a principal means of (1) fund raising; and/or (2) soliciting volunteers; and (3) some organizations seek to develop good will and

disseminate information, such as a university or a utility company. Speech communication students, of course, are well suited to assist these efforts, as they are skilled in speaking and training. This project sought to maximize the opportunities for doing so.

Stage one of the project utilized eight students to conduct research of two types: library research and correspondence to identify professional practices related to bureaus, including model programs, etc.; and identification of community activity relating to bureaus. Preliminary planning was also begun for a community workshop. Stage two was the sponsorship of the community workshop and a pilot program that placed four students in an internship capacity in organizations, with the goals of developing or improving bureaus. Stage three seeks to develop an on-going community network for those interested in bureaus. The long-term goal of the project is for the Speech Communication Department to function as a resource center for the community; ideally, interested organizations will be able to contact the department and design an acceptable learning program for interns to begin or improve a bureau. This community service could provide students with the challenge of training speakers, publicizing the organization, and a good deal of worthwhile communication experience.

Literature Research

We were not optimistic that systematic research would yield a great deal of knowledge about speakers' bureaus, and our inclinations were confirmed by the NACSA member regarded as the authority: Nancy Popemma had apparently pioneered efforts to develop community networks of organizations interested in bureaus but was not optimistic about locating published materials. Indeed, database research revealed that there are few materials to guide the interested reader.

The term "speakers' bureau" is sometimes used to refer to a profit-making "booking agency," which may be a "full-service bureau" or a "limited bureau" that specializes in a particular type of speaker, such as sports figures (Walters, 1986). For example, one agency specialized in marketing products to the working woman on behalf of department stores (Croft, 1985). Full-service bureaus are sometimes associated with the National Speakers Association or Toastmasters International (Richard, 1985; Walters and Walters, 1985); less accessible and/or helpful materials include those that provide guidelines for utilizing the services of these bureaus (for example, Dickson, 1981; Ferrier, 1983; Hughes, 1985; and Palmer, 1976).

As discussed herein, an "in-house" speakers' bureau (Walters, 1986) is often developed by utility companies, for example, to disseminate information and enhance images (Laird, 1978). Less accessible and/or helpful materials include those that detail speakers' bureaus in the banking ("Action, Not Reaction, . . . ," 1979), land development (Kalvin, 1985) and insurance (Haggerty, 1984) industries, and a number of other case studies. Speakers' bureaus are also used by non-profit organizations, of course, to disseminate information; for example, a group of educators successfully enhanced the image of home economics as an area of study in Colorado (Brink and Haschke, 1987). A useful guide, developed to assist non-profit organizations, devoted a chapter to speakers' bureaus (Maddalena, 1981). Less accessible and/or helpful materials include those that offer generalized suggestions or case studies (for example, Brown, 1983; Kraus, 1986) and suggest that local colleges may be a good means of scheduling a speaker at no cost (Sabo, 1983).

Thus, a review of literature revealed that no similar community project had been reported, and there was a shortage of helpful advice for those seeking to develop a bureau.

Community Research

Students conducted a thorough, massive telephone canvass of the San Diego area in order to identify existing bureaus and interest in bureaus. The telephone directory and a local directory of organizations and other miscellaneous sources served as the data base of 700 public and private organizations and associations; approximately 150 existing bureaus were identified, some of which had a single spokesperson. An additional 200 groups and associations were contacted to determine their interest in inviting speakers; approximately 125 indicated an interest in hosting speakers.

This phase of the project was an invaluable experience: students learned a great deal about research and communication, though some aspects were painful. The telephone survey was tedious, exhausting and replete with problems. Contacting a knowledgeable source within an organization was sometimes difficult, and inquiries were sometimes treated with suspicion that contacts were a commercial solicitation effort; respondent cautiousness and rudeness were experienced.

A more pleasant aspect of this phase of the project was planning a half-day workshop for interested persons. Meeting planning was also an invaluable learning experience, of course, despite some inevitable frustrations. The objective of the workshop was simply to offer an opportunity to share information about bureaus, and representatives of thriving bureaus were invited to speak; 50 persons attended. In addition, the product of the research was distributed: a systematic, exhaustive, and unprecedented directory of (1) existing bureaus and (2) groups interested in hosting speakers.

The Pilot Internships

The purpose of the grant that made this project possible was to perform an on-going community service and to instill in students a sense of community service. Thus, a pilot project with a very small number of internships was the goal. As a result of the telephone survey and the workshop, four students developed internships associated with bureaus; two students developed bureaus of volunteers and/or fund-raising for profit organizations, one developed a bureau for a professional association, and one developed a bureau for a major industrial organization. All four had the opportunity to experience application of the communication principles that they had learned.

The on-going internship program is guided by a heavy academic component, and all bureau internships must meet these expectations. Like all internships that earn academic credit, an agreement with a bureau sponsor must be guided by a structured set of meaningful experiences that will lead to continued learning throughout the semester; on a week-to-week basis, the student must relate these experiences, in a journal, to principles that s/he has learned in prerequisite classes. In the case of a bureau, this program might include goal-setting, developing a training program, soliciting volunteers, monitoring the bureau program, and serving as a member of the bureau. At the time of this writing, several such opportunities are being developed.

An On-going Speakers' Bureau Network

The bureau project, and the workshop and the community directory in particular, were so successful that a need for an on-going bureau network became apparent. The application for a renewed grant was accepted, and the

Fall, 1989, semester is devoted to up-dating the directory and hosting another workshop designed to set up a self-sustaining community network, which will be associated with the Speech Communication Department in some way.

Conclusion

This project was extremely successful in terms of experiential learning and in terms of conducting a community service that will provide long-term opportunities for students. The project might serve as a good model for other departments with similar goals.

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